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ABSTRACT

This publication focuses on the major issues and requirements that schools need to consider in developing an effective schoolwide assessment program. It is the first in a series on assessment by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The primary purpose in developing an effective schoolwide assessment program must be to improve students' learning. A secondary purpose is to help monitor the school's effectiveness. To achieve these purposes, it is necessary to have the valid and reliable information about the ongoing performance of students that a good schoolwide assessment program provides. The following chapters are included: (1) "The Basic Questions"; (2) "Why a School-Wide Assessment Programme?"; (3) "Understanding the Big Picture"; (4) "National Monitoring and Assessment"; (5) "Meeting National Assessment Requirements"; (6) "Planning for School-Wide Assessment"; (7) "The Place of Professional Judgment"; (8) "Achievement Objectives and Assessment"; (9) "Recording and Reporting on Achievement"; (10) "Managing Change in the School"; and (11) "Conclusion." (Contains 3 figures and 39 references.) (SLD)

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School-Wide Assessment: THE BIG PICTURE

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WELLINGTON 1997

SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENT

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SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENT

THE BIG PICTURE

JAMES IRVING

NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EUDCATIONAL RESEARCH
WELLINGTON 1997

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NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
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INTRODUCTION

This publication by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) focuses on the major issues and requirements that schools need to consider in developing an effective school-wide assessment programme. It is the first in a series of NZCER publications on assessment. The others in the series will focus on a range of possible techniques for school-wide assessment which schools can consider in the development of their own programmes or use to validate and compare their existing programmes; models for school-wide assessment; assessing and recording achievement in English; implementing and assessing the technology curriculum; recording and reporting.

THE BASIC QUESTIONS

The basic questions about assessment are straightforward, and can be described as the what, why, when, how and who questions:

What do we want to know? and

What is the best way to obtain the information?

Why do we want to know it? and

When is the most appropriate time to obtain the information?

How are we going to use the information? and

Who needs to know?

Having decided to obtain the information, we then need to ask: Where to now? This will require decisions on the following:

How are we going to record the information?

How are we going to report it?

To whom are we going to report it?

How will it influence our forward planning?

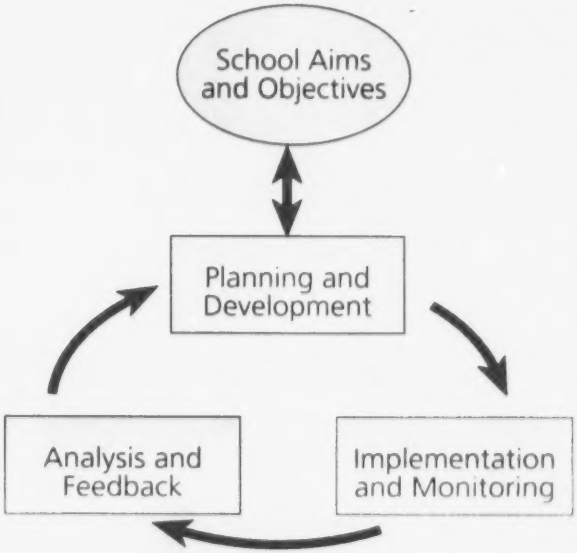
All of these questions are fundamental to an effective school assessment programme, because the answers help to determine the nature and purpose of the assessment and the most appropriate and effective methods, procedures and types of assessment that should be used.

2 WHY A SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME?

The primary purpose in developing an effective school-wide assessment programme for implementation in each classroom must be to improve students' learning. The secondary purpose is to help monitor the school's effectiveness. In both instances there is a clear link to the goals and objectives of *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993). In order to achieve these two purposes it is necessary to have valid and reliable information about the ongoing performance of students — both of individual students and of the overall student population. Good information on how the students and the school as a whole are progressing helps to establish learning needs and priorities, and to identify particular barriers to learning. A school-wide assessment programme that is working well should also provide information that will help to improve the overall operation and effectiveness of the school. Furthermore, it will have the associated benefits of assisting in the professional development of staff and in improving staff cohesion.

An effective school-wide assessment programme will serve the twin purposes of school improvement and accountability. Its starting point must be the school's own aims and objectives, and it should include three interacting components. The first is the key component of Planning and Development, the second is Implementation and Monitoring, and the third is Analysis and Feedback. This school-wide assessment loop is shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: DEVELOPING A SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME



If the process is working effectively, the resulting school-wide assessment programme should help a school to:

- enhance individual student achievement;
- recognise the effort and achievement of both students and staff;
- provide a basis for decisions about the continuation or modification of teaching programmes;
- improve programmes by making better use of available resources;
- allocate resources appropriately and effectively;
- maximise educational provisions and opportunities for students;
- enhance overall school achievement;
- facilitate staff development; and
- improve staff cohesion.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE

In order to develop an effective school-wide assessment programme, it is important for all involved to be familiar with and understand the big picture. The starting point is *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993), and in particular the section on Assessment (pages 24-26), which sets out the underlying philosophy and objectives of school-based assessment. The assessment of students' progress is essentially diagnostic and formative, in that its primary purpose is to identify students' learning needs and to improve students' skills and performance as part of ongoing teaching and learning. In other words, its aim should be **assessment for better learning**, to improve the quality of both teaching and learning.

This approach is discussed, and illustrated by a range of assessment exemplars, in the specific national curriculum statements that have now been finalised. For example, the statement on assessment contained in *Mathematics in The New Zealand Curriculum* (1992:15) is reiterated in similar form in all of the curriculum statements released to date:

> Assessment should, as far as possible, be integral to the normal teaching and learning programme. Continuing assessment as part of the teaching and learning programme increases the range and quality of assessment which can be carried out for good diagnosis, and avoids the artificial intrusion on learning and teaching time which is associated with separate assessment sessions. Assessment should involve multiple techniques.....

Further comment, direction and guidance are provided in various supporting curriculum publications. The most important of these for schools developing their assessment programmes is *Assessment Policy to Practice* (1994), which includes advice and guidance on the purposes and types of assessment, meeting national assessment requirements, planning and conducting assessment in the classroom, and recording and reporting information on students' achievement. It also contains a useful glossary of assessment terms, and a list of current resources appropriate to the New Zealand context. One of the most useful of these is Ruth Sutton's book, *Assessment: A Framework for Teachers* (1991), the first chapter of which contains a very accessible discussion of assessment terminology, approaches and ideas.

Other supplementary resources designed to assist schools in developing appropriate assessment programmes include *Developing Science Programmes* (1995), *Implementing Mathematical Processes* (1995), and *Planning and Assessment in English* (1997). These contain valuable suggestions and guidance for effective school-based assessment in specific areas of the curriculum. As new curriculum statements are developed and finalised, additional supporting publications will be produced by the Ministry of Education. Also under way in 1997 is a one-year trial to develop a cumulative record of student achievement against the New Zealand Curriculum, and a sample format for reporting to parents. If they wish, schools will be able to modify the formats to better meet their own needs.

NATIONAL MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT

The Ministry of Education is developing three programmes designed to complement school-based assessment by providing validating national information. These are the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP), being run by the Educational Assessment Research Unit of the University of Otago; the Assessment Resource Banks (ARBs) being developed by the NZCER, based on achievement objectives at levels 3 to 6 of the New Zealand Curriculum, for use at the Key Transition Points of Years 6–7 and 8–9; and School Entry Assessment (SEA).

National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP)

The purpose of NEMP is to get a broad picture of the achievement and other educational outcomes of nationally representative samples of students at two class levels, Year 4 (age 8–9) and Year 8 (12–13). It aims to provide a valid and reliable picture of what students can actually do at the two age levels, and how well national educational standards are being maintained over time. It will help to identify trends in educational performance, and provide information to educators and others to help improve educational achievement and the allocation of resources at the national level.

The first NEMP assessment was carried out in 1995. It focused on student achievement in three areas — science, art and information skills (graphs, tables and maps) — and the three reports were released in December 1996. NEMP will operate on a four-

year rolling cycle, and over that period will cover the full range of essential learning areas and essential skills of the New Zealand Curriculum. New Zealand is unique internationally in attempting to monitor the whole curriculum. The 1996 focus was on language (reading and speaking), aspects of technology, and music.

Assessment Resource Banks (ARBs)

These national assessment resources are broader than traditional item banks have been. Initial developmental work has been in mathematics and science, with work on an English language ARB commencing in 1997. These resources reflect the assessment philosophy and approaches recommended by *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (NZCF). This has meant more emphasis on a wider range of diagnostic and summative material to assess educational achievement, and incorporating a range of extended problem-solving exercises for students to respond to. Figure 2 shows the range of the ARBs.

It is intended that the ARBs will enable schools to compare the performance of their students with the 'typical' performance of students nationally. Schools will thus be able to validate their own results against the national results, and gain a clearer picture of where emphasis in teaching and programmes may be needed and most effective. The ARBs reflect current curriculum statements in mathematics and science, and cover curriculum levels 3 to 6. Thus it will be possible for schools to use the ARBs across a wider classroom range than just the proposed Transition Points.

FIGURE 2: ASSESSMENT RESOURCE BANKS IN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

ACHIEVEMENT AND DIAGNOSTIC TASKS AND ITEMS

Selected Response	*Constructed Response*
Multiple-choice	Enhanced multiple-choice
True/False	Structured
Matching	Paragraph
	Open-ended
	Extended answer
	Short-answer
	Completion

PRACTICAL TASKS

Completion and assembly
Experiments
Manipulative
Projects

ATTITUDE AND INTEREST SCALES

Rating scales
Check lists
Interview schedules
Questionnaires

Source: Croft et al (1995), *Assessment Resource Banks in Mathematics and Science: Transition Point Assessment* — Part 2 Implementation Trial. Wellington: NZCER, 1996.

The ARBs may be accessed on the World Wide Web, using a password system. The 'search engine' used to retrieve the ARB material is structured to be consistent with the NZCF.

In addition to school-based uses, the possibility of using data from ARB transition point assessment for some form of 'national cohort assessment' at Years 6–7 and 8–9 is being considered, and is still under development by the Ministry of Education.

School Entry Assessment (SEA)

As part of the Ministry's SEA programme, 'new, nationally standardised assessment activities for new entrants... will be available for teachers to use from May 1997' (*The New Zealand Education Gazette*, 10 March 1997). Three diagnostic activities in the areas of emergent literacy, oral language and numeracy have been published by the Ministry in English and te Reo Maori. While use of the SEA activities will not be mandatory, it is hoped that all new entrant teachers will see their value and make effective use of them. Schools will have a record form and summary sheet for each child. SEA data will be confidential to the individual school, and will not be used for inter-school comparisons. However, it is intended that schools will report their summarised results to the Ministry of Education so that a national picture can be established of the skills and knowledge of new entrants on entry to school. Information from the Ministry's analysis of SEA data will be returned to schools for their own use. The SEA programme will be accompanied by nation-wide professional development programmes in English and te Reo Maori, which most new entrant teachers will have completed by January 1998.

MEETING NATIONAL ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS

The National Education Guidelines

To round out their understanding of the big picture, it is important for Boards of Trustees (BOTs), principals and teachers to be familiar with the National Education Guidelines (NEGs). These spell out a range of requirements for schools, several of which have major implications for assessment. They contain the Government's desired outcomes for education in the form of National Education Goals, and a set of administrative requirements for schools, called the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs). These requirements are as follows:

> Boards of Trustees must foster student achievement by providing a balanced curriculum in accordance with the national curriculum statements (i.e., *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* and other documents based upon it).*
>
> In order to provide a balanced programme, each Board, through the Principal and staff, will be required to:
>
> i implement learning programmes based upon the underlying principles, stated essential learning areas and skills, and the national achievement objectives; and
>
> ii monitor student progress against the national achievement objectives; and
>
> iii analyse barriers to learning and achievement; and
>
> iv develop and implement strategies which address identified learning needs in order to overcome barriers to students' learning; and

v assess student achievement, maintain individual records and report on student progress; and

vi provide appropriate career information and guidance for all students, with a particular emphasis on specific career guidance for those students who, nearing the end of their schooling, are at risk of becoming unemployed.

*Existing syllabuses are regarded as national curriculum statements until replaced.

Source: *The New Zealand Education Gazette*, 30 April 1993, 1 July 1996.

The requirements of the NEGs, together with the assessment expectations of the NZCF and the national curriculum statements, mean that schools will need to demonstrate that they are:

- developing and using a range of assessment procedures to meet the different purposes of assessment;
- developing and using a range of assessment practices and procedures that are fair to all students and recognise the differences in gender, culture, background and experience that students bring to their learning;
- maintaining records that provide cumulative information on individual student achievement;
- aggregating information on individual student achievement (i.e., combining, grouping or summarising assessment information for ease of analysis and reporting), in a form that provides a clear picture, or 'school profile', of the overall levels of student achievement in the school at a given point in time;
- using assessment information to identify barriers to learning;

- recording and maintaining assessment information in a form that can be easily reported on, and passed on from year to year and from school to school;
- using assessment procedures that are clearly understood by students and parents.

These expectations spell out what a good self-managing school would want to be doing for its own purposes in the assessment of its students, and in the recording and reporting of this information. In other words, a school should be planning for and undertaking the above tasks to meet its own educational and management needs and purposes, quite apart from any external requirements. In providing an effective system of internal accountability in the monitoring, recording and reporting of its students' progress and achievement, a school will also be meeting external accountability requirements. To do this successfully, a school should be able to answer two basic questions:

> How do we know that the students in our school are learning and making progress?
>
> On what evidence is this based?

These are not unreasonable questions to be asked of schools by parents and the wider community. The answers provided by a school should enable it to demonstrate the extent to which it is enhancing student learning. It is important to emphasise here that 'assessment of student achievement' and 'assessment of school effect' should not be regarded as separate components, but rather as a continuum with the two components closely related.

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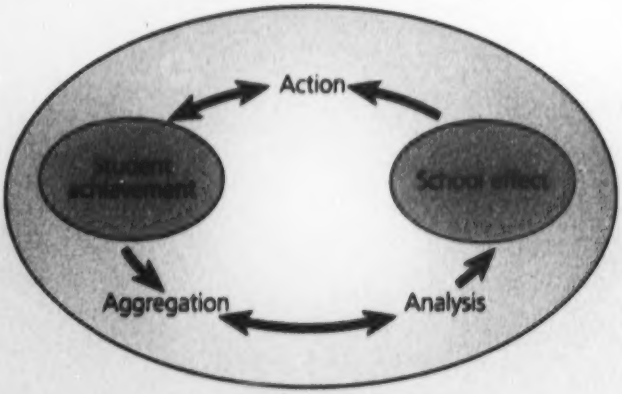
The question arises of what constitutes evidence. Selected samples of sound classroom assessment information can provide the basis for aggregation and analysis in order to show overall school effect. A difficulty here is that a good deal of valuable but informal classroom assessment information that is directly formative (for example, anecdotal records and observations) may not be suitable for aggregation or, if focused on individuals, cannot be easily aggregated. This may mean that some of the richest informal information will not be suitable for accountability purposes. Nevertheless, this information can have high validity, and very useful summary judgments can be derived from it. In turn, these judgments can be expressed in a series of meaningful qualitative summary statements that profile class or school progress and achievement over time.

The key to planning for assessment is to ensure that the emphasis is placed on teaching and learning to meet students' needs, rather than simply trying to match assessment to the achievement objectives. Planning for assessment needs to be linked to the learning programme in such a way that selected achievement objectives, and their associated assessment, will be clearly embedded in the programme. The design of the learning programme and planning for assessment should go hand in hand.

Some useful examples of the ways in which teachers can take qualitative information and use it to report on school effect are contained in *Developing Science Programmes* (1995). The effective use of such information should help the school to take action in

relation to teaching and learning, programme planning and development, and the allocation of resources, which should all feed back into improving student learning and achievement. This process is expressed in Figure 3 , and leads into the next section on planning for school-wide assessment.

FIGURE 3: ASSESSING FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND FOR SCHOOL EFFECT



PLANNING FOR SCHOOL-WIDE ASSESSMENT

In order to be effective, a school-wide assessment programme must be developed in a planned and systematic manner. Such a programme needs to be an integral part of a school's process of self-review and self-management, leading to ongoing school improvement. The planning process should involve the whole teaching staff in order to ensure a sense of 'ownership', with everybody committed to the programme. Some schools have tackled this effectively by establishing a small assessment planning and co-ordinating team to carry out the initial stages, followed by one or two teacher-only days with the full staff focusing on school-wide assessment. Of course this is not feasible for small schools, where the principal must take the key initiative.

Essential elements that need to be included in planning for school-wide assessment are:

- First, and most important, **an emphasis on improving learning**. School-wide assessment needs to be integral to, and embedded in, the teaching and learning process in order to diagnose students' learning needs, monitor students' progress, and review programme effectiveness.
- Secondly, **a range of different purposes**, which will require **different assessment methods and procedures**. These will include surveys, running records, checkpoints, formal and informal tests, nationally normed tests such as PAT, observations and anecdotal records, student self-assessment, conferencing,

and portfolios. Good advice on this topic is provided by Cedric Croft in his article 'Assessment Strategies for the New Zealand Curriculum Framework' (1995).

- Thirdly, **a systematic and coherent focus**. This means that school-wide assessment will need to be manageable and balanced, in order to avoid the dangers of over-assessment or inappropriate assessment. In the long run, a well-planned and coherent assessment programme should lead to less formal assessment, not more.

As indicated in the previous section, the overall quality of the assessment programme will depend on sound classroom information, with teachers making appropriate professional judgments on the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

THE PLACE OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT

In planning for coverage of the achievement objectives set out in the national curriculum statements, teachers need to judge how best to manage assessment so that learning is maximised and over-assessment does not occur. Teachers also need to value and use their professional judgment in assessing student achievement. This means making informed judgments of students' work, using their training and experience of teaching and learning and child development, and basing these judgments on a range of valid and reliable assessment information collected over time.

Professional judgment will be required in making decisions on **what, when, why** and **how** to assess, and in selecting the most appropriate achievement objectives against which to assess. It is important that teachers see assessment as an ongoing process that takes account of observational and anecdotal information beyond what is written down and or formally tested. Sensible, rounded judgments of student progress should be based on a wide range of information. However, assessment decisions will sometimes need verification or moderation, in order to ensure reliability. While some judgments will clearly be sounder than others, teachers should be able to look at a colleague's assessment information and understand what the information means and how the judgments were arrived at.

The ways in which assessment decisions and judgments are made need to be carefully planned to ensure they are realistic

and feasible, taking into account the normal constraints of classroom interaction and other requirements. In other words, classroom assessment must be manageable. The tasks and procedures also need to:

- be suitable for the age group;
- assess what they set out to assess (i.e., be valid);
- be consistent over time in measuring what they set out to measure (i.e., be reliable); and
- be purposeful in improving learning.

The purpose and place of the achievement objectives in assessment are discussed in the following section.

ACHIEVEMENT OBJECTIVES AND ASSESSMENT

Along with the NZCF and associated curriculum statements, **achievement objectives** are used to measure student progress. They are outcome descriptors, designed to assist teaching and learning by clearly describing what students can reasonably be expected to achieve at the various levels of the curriculum. They also assist in the reporting of what students are actually achieving by providing clear descriptors of progress in the essential learning areas and essential skills.

The eight curriculum levels, each with their own set of achievement objectives, are designed to provide a basis for the description of a student's own progress, based on relevant achievement objectives. They also provide coherence and continuity for school learning, as they have been designed by experienced teachers using their knowledge of what children are capable of at various stages of learning.

The levels system is not designed to be a rigid age-related framework into which children must be fitted, but rather a tool to assist teachers in making professional judgments on the overall performance of a student or group of students. Thus it is probably more relevant to report a student's performance against the achievement objectives than to report that he or she is working at a particular level. However, this does not mean continuously assessing against all of the achievement objectives at a particular level or levels. Rather, it means building a valid and reliable picture of a student's achievement from information collected from the different assessments over a period of time. In this regard, it is important to make a distinction between 'formal assessment'

and 'coverage'. Teachers will collect a range of informal and formal assessment information over a period of about two years for each of the curriculum levels 1 to 5. (At curriculum levels 6, 7 and 8, the levels roughly correspond to Years 11, 12 and 13 of the senior secondary school.)

Over the two-year period, sufficient assessment information should become available to enable rounded judgments to be made on a student's progress against all of the achievement objectives. It does not mean that each achievement objective will have been formally assessed, as this would be impractical. However, teachers will need to have some evidence, either formal or informal, to justify their judgments on whether each achievement objective has been met.

This issue is clearly addressed in the section entitled 'Assessment and Evaluation in Technology', in *Technology in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1995:24), which states:

> The technology programme should provide a balanced coverage of all achievement objectives, but it is not expected or appropriate that all objectives will be assessed in each unit of work. The achievement objectives most relevant for assessment, in relation to the context and learning areas, should be carefully selected and suitable strategies designed. This selective, focused approach not only results in higher-quality assessment, but is more manageable for teachers. In selecting the objectives to assess, teachers should also monitor that their choices reflect a balance of the strands and objectives, not simply ease of assessment.

RECORDING AND REPORTING ON ACHIEVEMENT

Context plays a key role in the effective recording and reporting of school-based assessment information. This is because the most meaningful assessment will occur within the context of a school's teaching and learning programmes. Student performance and achievement are much better assessed using a manageable range of assessments relevant to the teaching and learning context. Simply gathering assessment information on the application of knowledge or the performance of specific skills, outside the context of study, will trivialise the quality of the learning and the validity of the resulting assessment information. Ignoring context over-emphasises assessment at the expense of teaching and learning, when they should be seen as integrated. Effective integration is much more likely to occur if assessment takes place within meaningful contexts as a coherent part of the teaching and learning process.

When topics are planned in an integrated way (i.e., when achievement objectives are drawn from several essential learning areas and or essential skills), teachers need to ensure a clear focus for assessment. In such cases they should use their professional judgment to select the most appropriate and relevant objectives from those available. In doing so, they will need to make decisions on which of the selected objectives should be assessed and reported on for the particular topic chosen. A key issue for the teacher is classroom manageability. It is, however, important for the teacher to avoid combining achievement objectives simply for ease of coverage or

assessment. Teaching programmes arranged in this way are unlikely to provide a clear focus that integrates assessment with students' learning needs.

For recording and reporting, the issue of aggregation of assessment information also needs to be considered carefully. If aggregation is clearly and sensibly done, it will make for much more meaningful reporting, either at the classroom or at the school level. Over time, teachers will assess their students' work many times, in a variety of ways, and cover various aspects of achievement and performance. In trying to make sense of this information, the teacher needs to consider how much of it should be collated and summarised, and in what form. In large part, the decision will depend on the purpose of the reporting — whether it is for:

- the students themselves;
- the parents;
- other teachers or schools;
- the Board of Trustees (BOT); or
- the Education Review Office (ERO).

Clearly, a parent is interested in the individual child, whereas the BOT (or ERO) is interested in the overall picture of the school, and how well groups of students are progressing against the aims and objectives set by the school.

Superficially, the process of aggregating information seems easier when numerical marks are used. While this process may allow discussion and decisions about a student's or a school's overall

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performance, it is unlikely to throw much light on the particular strengths and weaknesses of students. Aggregating numerical information tends to focus on some implied general level of performance rather than on specific educational achievements. A more effective way of obtaining an overall picture of a student's or a school's performance is to build up a profile of educational achievements. The essential learning areas and essential skills of the NZCF can provide a useful basis for profiling, and a number of schools are using them effectively for this purpose.

A profile provides a qualitative record in clear written statements, across the whole range of the curriculum. Primary profiling will cross all essential learning areas and essential skills, whereas secondary profiling will tend to be subject-based. The achievement objectives of the curriculum statements provide a language that makes this form of aggregation and reporting possible, for the individual, for the class, or for the school. It is also possible to convert qualitative information to numerical scales if this is desired. What needs to be remembered about numerical reporting is that the numbers in themselves mean little unless we can look behind them to explain in qualitative terms what a student knows and can do.

The key to sensible and manageable aggregation is to plan in advance what is to be reported on and how best to collect and aggregate the assessment information. Cedric Hall's *Exploratory Study of Assessment Aggregation* (1994:14) describes some experimental procedures used in two schools to try to develop 'a scale or system of benchmarking

against which to report aggregated results'. More recent practical advice to schools on developing workable school-based assessment systems is provided in the work of Baker and Lorrigan (1995, 1996).

A further issue that needs to be considered is the moderation of assessment judgments between teachers. Over a period of time, teachers may wish to reach a common understanding by comparing samples of students' learning and the assessment of that learning. For this purpose it is useful to compare the samples with baseline information that represents an agreed standard of work collated over time, and reflects a range of contexts, learning experiences, and the assessment tasks planned for. Both the NEMP and ARB projects will provide schools with a valuable range of nationally validated assessment exemplars of 'typical' student performance, which should help to facilitate the moderation process within and between schools.

Some issues for reporting

The NZCF structure has the potential to enhance the reporting of students' educational progress, by clarifying curriculum entitlements and specifying achievement objectives at each curriculum level, and by encouraging teachers to co-ordinate their assessment approaches before the assessment information is reported.

If communication about a student's achievement and educational progress is to be effective, it must go beyond the numbers-in-boxes reporting of achievement levels reached, and enable a more rounded picture of the student to emerge. This will allow

appropriate professional judgments to be made about which teaching and learning strategies have been most effective.

At every stage of student transfer, from class to class or school to school, a range of carefully selected, annotated and dated examples of the student's work and progress will be much more meaningful, particularly to other professionals, than masses of decontextualised information or summary statistics.

It needs to be kept in mind that the documentation of assessment information is only as worthwhile and useful as the information it contains, and the validity and reliability of the methods and procedures that have provided the information. There is a real danger of over-emphasising product at the expense of process, and losing sight of the learner and his or her educational needs. The basis for effective documentation must be sound classroom information.

Decisions for reporting

If a school's assessment and record-keeping systems are well planned and working effectively, there should be plenty of assessment information available to share and report on. Planning these systems will require decisions on:

- How much is useful to report?
- What baseline information is needed?
- What form should the baseline information take?
- How can progress best be shown?
- What information is needed to show overall school effectiveness?

- How should the information be aggregated to show school effectiveness?
- When and how often will it be reported?
- To whom will it be reported?
- What form should the reporting take?
- What will the information be used for?

In all of the above, the paramount consideration for the teacher and the school must be assessment to improve teaching and learning, not assessment as an end in itself, divorced from the curriculum and the students.

Reporting to the home

An effective school report to the home will convey a clear message to the child's parents or caregivers that the teacher(s), principal and school know the child well and have accurately identified his or her learning needs. It will provide clear information about the child's progress and achievement, and also comment on social and personal development. It should be positive in its focus, commenting on strengths and development needs, and identifying 'where to next?' for learning and teaching. It needs to take a constructive approach in order to motivate and encourage the student rather than discourage. While parents will be the primary audience, the report will also be of practical use to the students themselves and to teachers. Finally, an effective report makes an important contribution to building and maintaining a constructive, ongoing dialogue between the home and the school.

Reporting to the Board of Trustees

The BOT will need clear evidence that the school's aims and objectives for teaching and learning are being met, and that there is an accurate record of students' achievement levels and progress over time. Good baseline information will be needed to give a clear picture of where the students are starting from, and show that their learning needs have been identified and reasonable expectations for progress set. In summary form at various points through the year, the information will show students' progress and indicate how well the school's aims and objectives for its students are being met. It will provide an ongoing profile of how the school is performing over time.

The report will be an integral part of the school's overall management plan, and a key component of its system of quality assurance. Quality assurance enables valid and reliable judgments to be made on the extent to which the school's teaching and learning programmes have improved educational outcomes for students. The report provides a safeguard that helps to reconcile the apparently competing demands of assessment for learning and assessment for accountability. The important point is that the two requirements need not be in conflict; rather they should be seen as complementary, with one flowing from the other. The report can also be used at the time of an ERO effectiveness review. There should be no need for a school to prepare a separate report specifically for ERO. Ongoing recording and reporting ensure that good information is already there as part of the school's own management plan and programme of self-review.

MANAGING CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL

Recent educational reforms, the development and implementation of new curricula, the introduction of new procedures and methods for teaching and assessment have all placed substantial new demands and expectations on teachers and schools. Schools need to be able to manage these changes in ways that ensure ongoing effectiveness and improvement.

There is now an extensive literature on managing change, school effectiveness and school improvement; for example, Brighouse & Tomlinson (1991), Cuttance (1994 & 1995), and Mortimore (1993). What these studies consistently show is that a number of key criteria, or preconditions, are necessary in order to ensure the effective management of change in a school. The first of these is **leadership**. Crucial in this regard is the role of the principal, and of the senior management team in schools of sufficient size to have such a team. The second criterion is for the school leadership to have the **confidence and support of the staff**. Thirdly, the school will have negotiated and established a **shared vision** with a clear focus on where it is heading, and agreement on its aims and objectives.

The way in which this agreement was reached will have been systematic and transparent. All staff will have been involved in the process, so there will be a clear sense of ownership of the programmes and procedures that the school develops and implements. There will be an emphasis on high standards that

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encourage all students to reach their potential; the expectations of both teachers and students will be high, but they should also be realistic. There will be provision for the systematic professional development of teachers, and for the ongoing review, adaptation and modification of programmes. Finally, good, positive and open relations will have been established between the school, its parents and the community.

CONCLUSION

This publication has noted the dual requirements of assessment for learning and assessment for accountability, and that these need not be seen as contradictory — one should flow from the other. A school's assessment programme should be a key component of its process of quality management and self-review, leading to quality assurance. The purpose of quality assurance should be to ensure that teaching and learning lead to improved educational outcomes for students. Quality management helps to ensure that quality assurance happens in ways that are most effective in facilitating students' learning and progress. The key question for the school's assessment programme, and its place in the overall process of school self-review, should be: does the assessment programme make a positive difference in facilitating students' learning and progress? The point is summed up in *Tomorrow's Standards* (1990):

> The goal is not just 'assessment', but 'assessment for better learning'.

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